RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES REVIEW

SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this document the attempt is made to comprehensively analyze the contents of all seven Background Papers in the Rural Development Policies Review series, and then draw conclusions and propose recommendations concerning the issues raised. This document is also a discussion paper to be circulated, together with the Background Papers, for discussion and comment to all concerned or interested parties. Not until such discussion and comment has occurred will firm recommendations be put forward by staff to Regional Council.

The seven Background Papers in the series are entitled as follows:

No. 1: Effects of Non-Farm Residential Severances on Agriculture: A Literature Review

No. 2: Halton's Farms in a Provincial Context

No. 3: Effects in Halton Region of Non-Farm Residential Severances on Agriculture

No. 4: Existing Rural Lots in Halton Region

No. 5: Rural Residential Infilling Potential

No. 6: Disposition of Retirement Lots and Family Severances

No. 7: Rural Estate Plans of Subdivision: Official Plan Policies

The intent at this stage in the review process is to deal mainly with policy issues and not with specific wording. Wording can be

worked out after consensus is reached on substantive policy matters.

There is a definite emphasis in this document on the impacts of non-farm development and of development pressures on the agricultural industry, almost to the exclusion of other important rural resources. The reasons for this emphasis are:

i) Regional Council in October, 1980, directed staff to prepare a report specifically on the impact of existing and future lot fragmentation on the Region's agricultural industry.

ii) Agriculture is the only rural resource which is being adversely affected and threatened to such a great degree by existing and future development pressures. That is not to say that Mineral Resources, Woodlots and Forests and Environmentally Sensitive Areas are not experiencing adverse impacts of rural development, but their continued existence does not appear to be anywhere near the crisis point at which agriculture finds itself.

iii) Agriculture is not merely a resource, but is a way of life that appears to be on the way out of Halton Region if nothing is done to maintain it as a viable industry.

The Rural Development Policies Review series also attempts to fulfil a Council direction made in April, 1983 to the effect that the Regional Plan rural development policies be reviewed with a particular emphasis on infilling outside Hamlets and Rural Clusters. Background Paper No. 5 is devoted to a study of the infilling potential in the rural area. The general review of the

rural development policies has lead to conclusions and recommendations focussing mainly on a strengthening of the Agricultural policies of the Regional Plan.

The third direction to staff which this series attempts to address originated with Planning and Development Committee in July, 1982, whereby a clarification was to be incorporated into the Regional Plan to prevent adjoining Rural Estate Residential Developments resulting in overall development in excess of 20 units. Because the directions were so specific, an actual proposed amendment was included in Background Paper No. 7 and little discussion was necessary in this document.

Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 5: Rural Cluster Policies (O.P.A. No. 5) was originally intended to also form part of the Rural Development Policies Review series, but due to the more urgent need for its adoption, it was processed to Regional Council in October, 1983. O.P.A. No. 5 contains significant amendments to the Settlement policies of the Regional Plan.

It is hoped that the information contained in the eight papers in the Rural Development Policies Review series will be of value regardless of any courses of action which may result.

2. RURAL LOT FRAGMENTATION AND AGRICULTURE

2.1 Introduction

Regional Council directed staff in October, 1980 to prepare a report on the impact of existing and further lot fragmentation on the Regional Official Plan policies and on the agricultural industry. Lot fragmentation includes all forms of the subdivision of land, with non-farm residential severances

comprising only a subset of lot fragmentation in general. A discussion of the impacts of non-farm residential severances in particular follows in the next section, while this discussion pertains to lot fragmentation and agriculture in broader terms.

None of the Background Papers was specifically directed at the impact of the reduction in size of farm parcels, but the effects on the agricultural industry of such past and future farm fragmentation were discussed in Background Papers Nos. 1 through 4 since such effects are inextricably linked to the pressures for non-farm development in a rural-urban fringe area.

2.2 Cause and Effects of Farm Lot Fragmentation

As illustrated in Background Papers Nos. 1 and 2, farm lot fragmentation is both a cause of adverse impacts on the agricultural industry and a symptom of exurban spread (defined in Background Paper No. 3, p.3) in a rural-urban fringe area. If unchecked, lot fragmentation is a cyclical process which is self-perpetuating. Non-farm land use pressures, (e.g. speculation, development, large lot estates, hobby farms, amenity agriculture, recreation, transportation) cause farmland values to rise. The higher land values disrupt the stability and inhibit the expansion of agriculture and encourage the idling of farmland and the pursuit of one-time profits for the farmer from the division and/or sale of farmlands.

Non-farm uses can afford to pay the higher land prices but usually require smaller parcels of land than do farming activities. The resulting fragmentation further inflates land values, causes non-farm intrusions into agriculture areas, and creates inefficiently sized farm lots, which further discourages intensive agriculture, and the cycle continues. Farmers can no

longer afford to purchase farmland and resort to land rental, reducing long term farm planning horizons, investment and intensity of farming. The uncertainty over long-term farm stability further reduces long-term capital investment and, together with high land prices, discourages new farmers from getting into farming and encourages the deterioration and abandonment of existing farms and farmland. As the agricultural industry appears to weaken and non-farm uses proliferate, pressures for non-farm development and further fragmentation increase, and the resistance to such pressures weakens because agriculture is no longer perceived as a strong, viable or predominant industry in a particular area. Over time farmers comprise a smaller and smaller proportion of the rural population and political decisions are more often made in favour of non-farm development or of the non-farm residents (see Background Papers Nos. 1 and 3).

If the political will to protect and promote the agricultural industry does indeed exist, then the cycle of agricultural deterioration in which lot fragmentation forms a crucial link can be impeded significantly. The most readily available and effective means of doing so is by significantly reducing farm lot fragmentation, not only for small residential lots but for the creation of larger parcels (2 to 20 ha.) for which there is little chance of farm viability and a much greater chance of non-farm use and further subdivision.

2.3 Viability and Farm Fragmentation

The existing Agricultural policies, (Part IV.A) of the Regional Plan utilize viability as the critical criterion for division of farm parcels into smaller farm parcels. The policies recognize "as a minimum farm lot size an acreage which leaves both the land

severed and the land retained as viable farm units, and direct the Land Division Committee to follow this standard....".

The viability criterion is actually used to promote lot fragmentation in two different arguments to the same end as observed by staff during its involvement in the Land Division Committee process. On one hand, proponents of applications to create smaller parcels of farmland argue that the smaller lots could be viable for a particular type of agriculture (e.g. poultry farm, horse farm, nursery), and this argument is often accepted despite the fact that the applicant often does not know or care to whom the parcel will be conveyed. On the other hand, some applicants will argue that the original lot is not of sufficient size to be viable in the first place and should therefore be permitted to be subdivided in order to make the "best" use of the land. The two arguments are often applied to different farm parcels of the same original size and soil capability. Viability as a criterion for farm fragmentation is not working to maintain a strong agricultural industry.

2.4 Reducing Farm Fragmentation

If Regional (and local) Council(s) sincerely wish to maintain and promote a viable agricultural industry in Halton, then a more effective program to prevent farm lot fragmentation is one means of moving in that direction. Such a program would involve improvements to the severance policies applying to agricultural land so as to make the division of such lands more difficult unless the intent of the division was clearly to create truly viable agricultural operations. It could also include more effective implementation of existing and future policies through better understanding and communication among Council(s), staff and the Land Division Committee. It is hoped that this Rural

Development Policies Review series is a step in the right direction in fostering such a better understanding.

Some members of Council may recall that in the version of the Regional Plan adopted by Council on September 6, 1978, there was a minimum farm lot size of 20 hectares with no provision for the creation of smaller farm parcels. It was through the Provincial modification process at the instigation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food that this minimum lot size was deleted and replaced with the vague viability criterion. While the Ministry's intent was to permit smaller, viable farm parcels, the adverse effects on agriculture of this Provincially inserted policy have far outweighed any benefits to the agricultural industry, due to the loose wording, inadequate performance standards and variable interpretations.

2.5 Policy Implications

A possible improvement to the policies is a compromise between the two positions, whereby the minimum 20 ha. farm lot size is reinstated, but detailed, comprehensive criteria are also inserted by which exceptions to the minimum lot size can be evaluated and considered for approval if there is reasonable certainty that viable operations will be established or continued on the smaller parcels. Also, the contribution of parcels of farmland to the viability of larger operations should be recognized even if viability as individual farm units on their own is not possible. These amendments would make the policies more sensitive to local conditions.

Policies affecting land use and land division cannot by themselves maintain a viable agricultural industry. Planning policies are only one of a large and complex series of factors

influencing agriculture. The Provincial and Federal governments and the world economy all play important roles. However, planning policies are the most important tool that municipalities have at their disposal for contributing to the maintenance of a viable industry.

Land division policies applicable to a predominantly agricultural area such as those which exist in other areas of southwestern Ontario are not necessarily effective in a rural-urban fringe area such as Halton Region, where extremely heavy non-farm development pressures and speculation exist.

3. NON-FARM RESIDENTIAL SEVERANCES AND AGRICULTURE

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous section, non-farm residential severances form a subset of the larger category of rural lot fragmentation. Due to the large numbers of such severances which have occurred in the past, to the relatively large number of such applications expected in future, and to the adverse effects (see Background papers Nos. 1 and 3) of non-farm residences on the agricultural industry, they are discussed in this report as a separate category of rural lot fragmentation.

The review of past research on the impacts of non-farm residential development on agriculture (Background Paper No. 1), together with Halton's farm statistics (Background Paper No. 2) and the questionnaire survey of Halton's farmers (Background Paper No. 3) confirming the existence in Halton of all of the serious symptoms of exurban spread, have clearly demonstrated the serious adverse consequences for agriculture of a lack of control in the past over rural residential development. This statement

is not intended to allocate blame for this situation since the concept of rural planning has only in recent years received much emphasis, and the existing situation is the end product of many thousands of seemingly unrelated decisions from many different sources over a very long period of time.

Not much can be done about many of the impacts suffered by the agricultural industry as a result of past development decisions. It is possible, however, that conflicts between non-farm and farm residents could be reduced through increased public awareness of rural living conditions in an agricultural area and of the problems confronting farmers. The publication pertaining to Halton Region by the Halton Community Pulse Group, entitled Ruralities in 1981 was an excellent example of what such a public awareness program might include. The Halton Federation of Agriculture and the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (H.A.A.C.) recently promoted "Agri-Food Week" for the same purpose. H.A.A.C was also involved in the publication entitled The Invisible Giant: Strengths and Concerns of Agriculture in Halton.

The Regional and Area Municipalities can make a significant contribution to maintaining a viable agricultural industry in Halton by preventing to the greatest degree possible any increase in the number of non-farm residences in agricultural areas, and by strictly limiting and controlling any such development that is permitted.

3.2 Rural Development Concept of Regional Plan

The existing Settlement policies of the Regional Plan attempt to foster a nodalized pattern of future rural growth, which basically means to concentrate future residential growth in compact clusters or communities rather than allow it to spread in

an ad hoc manner throughout the rural area as has occurred in the past. This is a fundamental principle of good rural planning practice. Although a clustered growth pattern does have some adverse impacts on agriculture, both direct and indirect, they are much less than with a dispersed pattern. By directing residential growth to the Hamlets and Rural Clusters, pressures on agricultural land values elsewhere may be lessened to some degree, farmers may feel an increased degree of certainty regarding the longer term prospects for their area, municipal hard and soft services can theoretically be provided at lower cost to a clustered form of development and energy resources are conserved to a greater degree.

Official Plan Amendment No. 5: Rural Cluster Policies (O.P.A. No. 5), recently adopted by Regional Council, significantly relaxed the restrictions on development within Rural Clusters in the Region as well as allowing a greater number of Rural Clusters to be designated in local official plans. As pointed out in report D.P.D. 162/83, the future development potential in Rural Clusters in Halton Hills and Milton has increased from a potential of 19 additiona lots under the existing policies of the Regional Plan to a maximum potential of approximately 700 new residential lots under the policies of O.P.A. No. 5. While it is not likely that every Rural Cluster will grow to its maximum potential, some may be re-designated to Hamlet status and grow even larger, and completely new Rural Clusters may be designated in future. Such a growth potential is of significance to agriculture despite the compact development concept, due to the consequent increase in the rural population and the many indirect adverse impacts on the agricultural industry that would accompany such a population increase (see Background Papers Nos. 1 and 3), but again these impacts will be less than with dispersed settlement.

The combination of the relaxed Rural Cluster development policies contained in O.P.A. No. 5, the Hamlet development potential and Rural Estate Plans of Subdivision, provides opportunities for a diversity of rural housing while at the same time attaining to the greatest degree possible the Growth and Settlement, Housing, Agriculture and other Goals and Objectives of the Regional Plan. To permit non-farm residential development elsewhere in the rural area would not allow Halton to attain its goal of maintaining a viable agricultural industry.

As illustrated in Background Paper No. 4, the 1307 existing vacant lots outside Hamlets and Rural Clusters represent a very significant rural residential development potential. Even if no further building lots are created, the construction of residences on vacant lots in the years to come in agricultural areas will cause additional adverse impacts on the agricultural industry.

In addition to impacts of past residential developments, and future development of vacant lots, the agricultural industry is coping and will have to continue to cope with increasing competition for agricultural land from amenity agriculture, hobby farms, recreational uses, highway and utility corridors, industrial and commercial uses, landfill operations and mineral extractive uses, not to mention expansion of Urban Areas, Hamlets and Rural Clusters and the development of Rural Estate plans of subdivision. In order to attain Growth and Settlement Goals and Objectives of the Regional Plan, and to attain other economic objectives, some of these land use activities are inevitable in a rural-urban fringe area and efforts must be made to minimize land use conflicts. The rural settlement principles of the Regional Plan should be maintained.

3.3 Regional Plan Policy Implementation

It is very interesting to note from the results of the survey in Background Paper No. 3 that the majority of farmers themselves, who stand to gain financially in the short term from a relaxation of the severance policies of the Regional Plan, supported most of the existing Regional Plan severance policies. Less than a majority of respondents (33%), however, felt that the policies were being applied so as to fulfil their intention of protecting agriculture. The main concern amongst those who did not feel that the policies were being adequately applied was that policy application was inconsistent or unfair. It is evident that the farmers themselves are well aware of the detrimental effects of non-farm residential severances on agriculture and realize that such development is not in their collective long-term best interests. The perception amongst a segment of the farmers that the policies are adequate but the implementation is not. Inconsistency is in itself a cause of uncertainty amongst the farming population regarding the future development of lands surrounding their farms. Uncertainty is not conducive to stability in the agricultural industry.

4. RURAL INFILLING

4.1 Effects of Infilling

Regional Council has directed staff to pay particular attention to infilling policies in the review of rural development policies in general. At first glance, infilling would appear to be a rather benign form of rural development, especially when not directly on or abutting agricultural lands. The arguments in favour of infilling reflect this view: What possible adverse

effects could "just one more" dwelling have when several already exist? There are no apparent conflicts between the existing residents and the agricultural community. The infilling dwelling will make good use of an existing, vacant and otherwise "useless" parcel of land.

Such arguments fail to take other factors into account and three such major factors are discussed below.

4.1.1 Infilling as Part of a Never Ending Process

Another factor which the arguments in favour of infilling fail to take into account is that over a number of years, an infilling process in a rural-urban fringe area with high pressures for non-farm development is a never-ending process. There will never be a finite number of infilling possibilities except at one point in time. Experience has shown that planning policies are bent or relaxed rather frequently to "provide flexibility" in decision-making. Thus an infilling policy, even with strict criteria, would likely prove to be the "thin edge of the wedge". As existing vacant lots are developed, as existing and new infilling lots are developed, as new lots are created (farmer retirement lots or lots for farm help, or lots created in contravention of planning policies),and as new dwellings are deliberately located so as to create new infilling situations, existing strip development is not only intensified, but over the years it expands and springs up in new locations. In some locations, the increased number of dwellings and non-farm uses may be justification for Rural Cluster or Hamlet designations, encouraging further development. Such a scenario may sound far-fetched and may not even be disturbing as far as rural settlement is concerned, but it would be very harmful for agriculture in this Region, and staff does not consider this

scenario to be far-fetched. The argument that infilling represents a finite, relatively insignificant process of development is not supported by past experience or by analysis of the results of Background Papers Nos. 1 to 5.

4.1.2 Indirect Impacts on Agriculture

The indirect impacts on agriculture of non-farm residential development, as described in detail in Background Papers Nos. 1 and 3 are a cause for considerable concern. To allow infilling cannot fail to exert an upward pressure on land values in the rural area, as an example of one of many indirect effects. This in turn has consequent adverse effects on the agricultural industry. Many vacant lots (of which there are 1307 in the Region as illustrated in Background Paper No. 4) including vacant farm lots suddenly become more valuable if a residence can be constructed in such a location as to create an infilling situtation. All of the farm lots upon which an infilling situation already exists will obviously rise significantly in value. Speculative activity would be further encouraged, and farmers' uncertainty about the future of farming would be increased. The actual development of infilling lots increases the non-farm rural population, increases the potential for farm/non-farm conflicts, and can adversely affect the social structure of the farm community. The increasing number of non-farm residences can lead to perceptions on the part of decision-makers that the area is already impacted by non-farm development and thus to erroneous judgements that a few more dwellings will make no difference to agriculture. Over 80% of the potential infilling lots identified in Background Paper No. 5 are located on or abutting Farmlands.

4.1.3 Impacts on Major Road System

Not considered in the arguments favouring infilling is the cumulative adverse impact over a number of years of additional infilling development and intensified and expanded strip development on the Regional system of Major Roads (which is shown on Map 2 of the Regional Plan). A high percentage (40%) of potential infilling lots exist on Major Roads as illustrated by the infilling study in Background Paper No. 5. If considered in light of the argument that infilling will be part of a never-ending process of creating linear development on rural roads, the cumulative adverse impacts on the Regional Major Road system will be significant. To permit infilling would not be a positive step toward fulfillment of the Regional Plan Transportation objectives. The safety, efficiency and function of the Major Road system would deteriorate significantly.

4.2 Regional Plan Goals and Objectives

Development as infilling is not supported by the Goals and Objectives of the Regional Plan. Of all potential infilling lots identified, 90% are located on Major Roads or in Environmentally Sensitive Areas or on or abutting Farmlands. As far as the Goals and Objectives pertaining to Growth and Settlement are concerned, the last two objectives are particularly relevant:

> "3A.06 To direct rural residential development to identifiable rural communities that are suitable.
>
> 3A.07 To avoid future strip (ribbon) development along rural roads."

These two objectives possess significant merit from a rural planning respective. Policies allowing infilling in the rural area would definitely not be working toward the attainment of these objectives. The prevention of linear development is an accepted principle of rural planning. A mere group of houses, sometimes only two, cannot usually be considered to be an identifiable community. Strip development could actually be considered to be initiated by infilling in circumstances where two existing dwellings suddenly become a linear development of three, or four or more dwellings through the infilling process plus development on vacant lots. In other circumstances, existing strip development is intensified. In also considering the "thin edge of the wedge" argument discussed above, infilling could lead to brand new strip development situations which would not have otherwise come to exist.

For reasons already mentioned, infilling would not be working toward the attainment of the following Agriculture Goals and Objectives:

"3D.G1 To develop and maintain a permanently secure, economically viable agricultural industry as an important component of Halton's economic base, and as a scource of employment for Halton's rural community."

"3D.04 To protect farms where possible from activities and land uses which would limit productivity or efficiency."

"3D.07 To preserve the farm community as an important social resource."

4.3 Policy Implications for Regional O.P.A. No. 5

Based on the studies of impacts on agriculture of lot fragmentation including non-farm residential development (Background Papers Nos. 1 to 3), based on the statistics regarding existing lots (Background paper No. 4) in the rural area, based on the study of infilling potential (Background Paper No. 5) and based on the Goals and Objectives of the Regional Plan relating to both settlement and agriculture, staff cannot recommend that any non-farm residential development, including infilling, be permitted outside Hamlets, Rural Clusters or Rural Estate plans of subdivision.

Because staff does not recommend that infilling be permitted for the reasons stated above, it follows that staff does not advocate any changes to the intent of two Settlement policies which as revised by Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 5: Rural Cluster Policies, read as follows:

> "Permit Rural Area non-farm dwellings to locate only in Hamlets, in Rural Clusters, or on lots created by Rural Estate plans of subdivision, all in accordance with other pertinent policies of this Plan and local official plans."
>
> "Permit, in the Rural Area, infilling to occur only in Hamlets or Rural Clusters and if such infilling conforms to all other pertinent policies of this Plan."

If these policies in O.P.A. No. 5 are approved with the present intent maintained, then no new non-farm residential lot creation will be permitted outside Hamlets, Rural Clusters and Rural Estate Residential Developments. Such policies are necessary in

the interests of the agricultural industry and sound rural planning.

5. FARMERS' RETIREMENT LOT POLICIES

5.1 Introduction

Although the number of retirement lots created in the study period (1975-1981) was relatively few (33), as described in Background Paper No. 6, that investigation did reveal that at least a small portion of lots created for farmer retirement were simply sold off and the original applicants were still the owner of the bulk of the farm. Instances such as those tend to be what prompts criticism of the application of Regional severance policies as "inconsistent and unfair", documented in the survey of farmers described in Background Paper No. 3. This is compounded by the fact that a sizeable proportion of the applications did not conform to Regional policies at the time of approval.

In the long term, most if not all retirement lots will become non-farm residential lots, so in the interests of agriculture the retirement lots created should be carefully controlled to ensure that the intent of the Regional retirement lot policy is being fulfilled. There are no reasonable steps to be taken to absolutely guarantee that the retirement lots created will be used for the farmer's retirement residence and that the bulk of the farms will at the same time be conveyed to new farmers, but a more careful screening process and possibly some wording improvements to the existing policies may help reduce the number of instances of misuse of the policies.

5.2 Issues of Concern

Farmers are no different from anyone else in desiring a certain amount of security concerning their retirement arrangements, sometimes well ahead of the actual time of retirement. For that reason it is difficult to require that a retirement lot be created only at the time of retirement. Also, if a retirement dwelling is to be built on the lot and the bulk of the farm is to be sold, such arrangements may take a great deal of time to come to fruition. It is thus possible that some farmers who have every intention of retiring on the lot created and who do intend to convey the bulk of the farm to a new farmer may wish to create the retirement lot in advance of their actual retirement. A well-intentioned farmer may also for various reasons apply for a retirement lot in such a manner that the retirement lot is the lot to be conveyed, with the bulk of the farm to be temporarily retained by the farmer. If someone is intent on misusing the retirement lot privileges, no requirements that the retirement lot be the retained lot or that the lot be created at the time of retirment will prevent such misuse, and may in fact place unreasonable restrictions on a farmer's ability to effectively plan for his retirement.

5.3 Policy Implications

The only Regional Official Plan policy change that may help to better achieve the intent of the existing policy would be a minor wording amendment to the existing criteria to the effect that the retirement lot must be intended for the actual retirement residence of the farmer. The retirement lot privilege was inserted in the Regional Plan by Council in 1978 to allow the farmer to retire on the lands he has farmed and in the community in which he has lived for many years. To allow retirement lots

to be created and sold simply as a source of retirement funds would not be in the long term best interests of agriculture.

6. EFFECTIVENESS OF REGIONAL PLAN AGRICULTURE POLICIES

The information contained in the other Background Papers and a review of the existing Agriculture policies of the Regional Plan has lead staff to the conclusion that these existing policies are not adequate to protect agriculture from the indirect adverse impacts of Rural Estate plans of subdivision or from non-farm development in general. As has been pointed out in the Background Papers, the indirect adverse effects on the agricultural industry of residential development in an agricultural area are more significant yet more difficult to predict and to measure than the direct impacts.

It is not necessary to repeat once again what these indirect impacts are, but the point is that the evaluation criteria for non-farm development in the existing Agriculture policies of the Regional Plan focus on the protection of prime agricultural soils for farming and to a lesser degree on the compatibility of non-farm development with surrounding farm operations. Compatibility is usually evaluated almost exclusively on the basis of potential conflicts in the day to day operations of the adjacent farm and non-farm uses. Land use decisions are often made largely on the basis that the non-farm development is located on land which is low or poor quality farmland. The indirect effects on the individual farmers in the area, on the farming community, and on the agricultural industry are not usually taken into consideration, but on the whole are the more damaging long term effects.

As a case in point, the Ontario Municipal Board (O.M.B.) recently rendered a decision (Almond Developments vs Region of Halton) approving an application for a Rural Estate designation in an agricultural area, based in part on a very literal interpretation of the Regional Plan policies because prime agricultural soils were preserved and compatibility with adjacent farming operations was ensured to the maximum degree possible. Since the Regional Plan did not specifically set out any evaluation criteria based on indirect impacts of development on the agricultural community, the Board could not give much weight to this important aspect of the application.

In the same decision, the Board stated that "the agricultural area has been extensively infiltrated with residential development primarily in the form of ribbon development...". This is an illustration of how incremental development through non-farm residential severances can have a "snowball" effect and lead to further development approvals which are very damaging to agriculture. If the above-quoted criteria of residential infiltrations were used on every application for non-farm development in the Region, there would not be very many situations where it would not apply, given the extent of scattered and strip residential development. In a rural-urban fringe area such as Halton Region, if the agricultural industry is to remain strong and viable, the existing residential uses in agricultural areas must be recognized as a burden that the industry is forced to live with, but also as a burden which should not be increased through additional development. In staff's opinion, this argument used by the Board member is tantamount to stating that once strip development exists in an area, then there is an inherent bias in favour of further residential development notwithstanding the adverse impacts on the health and viability of agriculture. Agriculture should be

the preferred land use in a rural area where the soils are of high capability despite the existing mixed use nature of that area. To consider it otherwise is to virtually write off a large portion of the rural area for long-term agricultural uses, contrary to the Goals and Objectives of the Regional Plan and contrary to any efforts to support agriculture.

In light of the current thrust of the Regional Plan emphasizing preservation of prime agricultural soils and compatibility of development with adjacent farming operations, Regional staff consider Rural Estate Residential Developments to be a very serious threat to the health of the agricultural industry in Halton. The O.M.B. decision regarding Almond Developments underscores this conclusion. In any agricultural area there are pockets of non-agricultural lands. If in such circumstances the adjacent farming operations are such that day-to-day conflicts with proposed non-farm uses are perceived to be minimal, then it is very difficult on the basis of existing Regional Plan Agriculture policies to argue strongly against Rural Estate development applications in the pockets of non-agricultural lands. Yet such applications if approved will, in the long-term, be extremely damaging to agriculture for they can seriously disrupt a predominantly agricultural area.

From the results of Background Paper No. 2 it can be seen that over one-half of all the farmland in Halton Region is rented land, which leads to the conclusion that a sizeable proportion of the farmland is owned by speculators or developers. It is thus anticipated that pressure for Rural Estate plans of subdivision and other non-farm developments will continue and will most likely increase in future. Such pressure is fueled by such decisions as that made by the O.M.B. in the Almond Developments case.

In conclusion, staff is of the opinion that the Agriculture policies of the Regional Plan must be strengthened and broadened in scope to take into account the short and long-term indirect impacts of non-farm development on the larger agricultural community and industry. Specific amendments are not suggested at this time, because much discussion with concerned agencies, groups and individuals is necessary before appropriate policies can be formulated. The Area Municipalities, the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, among others, will be necessary participants in the policy formulation process.

7. CONCLUSIONS

1. The agricultural industry in Halton Region has and will continue to suffer the adverse impacts of past lot fragmentation, which includes both the reduction in size of farm parcels and the intrusion of non-farm uses into an agricultural community.

2. The agricultural industry in Halton Region is suffering from the stress exerted by the pressures of exurban spread which are typical of those found in rural-urban fringe areas. In spite of this, it remains a very strong and viable industry which makes a valuable contribution to the economic health of the Region. The industry should be better maintained and protected from the adverse effects of exurban development pressures.

3. While the direct impacts of non-farm development on agriculture, i.e. loss of agricultural land and productivity, are important and are cause for concern, the

less immediately visible and less quantifiable indirect effects of exurban development and development pressures are of greater concern to the agricultural industry. The agricultural industry experiences many of these indirect effects whether or not the development is located on farmlands and notwithstanding the fact that non-farm uses may already exist in the area. These indirect effects have environmental, social, economic and political consequences for the farming community.

4. The pressures for non-farm development and farm lot fragmentation will continue to increase in Halton Region.

5. The adverse impacts on agriculture of past development decisions will continue to increase as Rural Estate plans of subdivision already given draft approval are developed and as residences are constructed over the years on many of the 1307 existing, vacant lots in the rural area.

6. The adverse impacts on agriculture will continue to increase due to the expansion of Urban Areas, Hamlets and Rural Clusters, future rural industrial development, the effects of an increasing number of hobby farms, the increasing popularity of amenity agriculture (e.g. horse farms), the intrusion and fragmentation caused by highway construction and utility corridors, new Rural Estate plans of subdivision, and mineral extractive operations.

7. If agriculture is to be maintained as a permanently secure, economically viable industry and an important component of Halton's economic base, which is the stated Agricultural goal of the Regional Official Plan, then stringent land severance and development policies outside Hamlets and Rural Clusters are required.

8. The existing Agricultural policies of the Regional Official Plan must be strengthened to prevent the further fragmentation of rural lands with the consequent increase in adverse effects on the agricultural industry. Policies necessary to prevent rural lot fragmentation in a rural-urban fringe area must be more stringent than those acceptable in a completely rural area. The policies must recognize that existing agricultural operations are capable of continuing in a mixed-use area provided that approval of new non-farm uses does not continue.

9. The existing thrust of the Agriculture policies of the Regional Plan to protect prime agricultural soils and to ensure compatibility between non-farm development and adjacent farm operations needs to be broadened in scope to also recognize the even greater significance to Halton's agricultural industry of the indirect effects of non-farm development and of farm lot fragmentation.

10. The use of farm viability as a criterion for the division of farm lands, as currently worded in the Regional Plan Agriculture policies, has been proven to be unsuccessful in resisting the heavy pressures for farm lot fragmentation present in a rural-urban fringe area. The policies should be more restrictive toward farm fragmentation and a suggested amendment is to reinstate Regional Council's original minimum 20 ha. farm lot size together with specific and detailed criteria for exceptions to this minimum size in cases where truly viable agricultural operations are being proposed. In addition, it is suggested that the policies be amended to recognize the value of the actual or potential contribution of an individual farm parcel to the viability

of a larger agricultural operation even if the parcel itself cannot be considered a viable farm unit.

11. The Agriculture policies of the Regional Plan pertaining to the creation of lots for retiring farmers should be clarified to the effect that the lot creation will only be considered if it is the clear intention of the applicant to use the lot for his or her own principal retirement residence.

12. The objectives of the Regional Plan pertaining to Growth and Settlement and to Agriculture can both be attained in a reasonably complementary manner provided that the thrust of the Settlement policies remains one of nodalized growth i.e. non-farm residential growth only in Hamlets, Rural Clusters and Rural Estate plans of subdivision, and provided that the Agricultural policies are strengthened to adequately control Rural Estate plans of subdivision and other non-farm development by also requiring consideration of the indirect impacts on the agricultural community. The two sets of Regional Plan objectives are not necessarily incompatible.

13. The intent and thrust of the existing Regional Plan Settlement policies, as clarified and amended by Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 5: Rural Cluster Policies, should be maintained and the policies should be consistently and effectively implemented. The policy implication is that non-farm residential severances outside Hamlets and Rural Clusters should be prohibited.

14. Infilling in the rural area outside Hamlets and Rural Clusters should not be permitted due to the cumulative adverse effects on the agricultural industry and on the Regional system of Major Roads. Infilling in a rural-urban fringe area with heavy development pressures would be a never ending process of rural development when considered in combination with residential construction on many of the 1307 existing vacant lots in the rural area, with new lots created for retirement or farm help purposes or in contravention of the Regional Plan, with the inevitable bending and stretching of whatever infilling criteria were imposed, and with the deliberate creation of new infilling situations through the strategic location of new dwellings. Infilling would be the main component of a never ending process of initiation, intensification and extension of strip development on rural roads, in contravention of Regional Plan goals, objectives and policies and in opposition to sound planning principles. For this reason, the intent of policies in Regional O.P.A. No. 5 pertaining to non-farm residential development and to infilling outside Hamlets, Rural Clusters and Rural Estate plans of subdivision should remain as is, i.e. such development is not permitted.

15. In the interests of maintaining a viable agricultural industry and of protecting other rural resources, the Regional Plan policies should be consistently applied.

16. The amendments to the Regional Plan policies pertaining to Rural Estate Residential Developments as suggested in Background Paper No. 7 should be circulated to concerned agencies for preliminary comments.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a staff review of the Agriculture policies of the Regional Plan be initiated with a view to strengthening the policies. Such a review will involve consultation with all concerned agencies, parties, groups, and individuals and will consider, but not be restricted to, the following:

   i) more stringent policies pertaining to farmland fragmentation.

   ii) the reinstatement of a 20 ha. minimum farm lot size together with detailed criteria for exceptions to this minimum size in cases where truly viable agricultural operations are proposed.

   iii) the recognition that farm lots which are not viable units themselves can make valuable contributions to the viability of larger operations.

   iv) the clarification of the retirement lot privileges to the effect that in order to be eligible, an applicant must definitely intend to use the lot for his/her retirement residence.

   v) the addition of evaluation criteria for non-farm development which will require consideration of the indirect impacts of non-farm development on the agricultural community.

2. That the intent of the policies in Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 5: Rural Cluster Policies, whereby non-farm residential development and infilling are prohibited outside Hamlets, Rural Clusters and Rural Estate plans of subdivision, be maintained.

3. That in the interests of maintaining a viable agricultural industry in Halton Region and of fostering a public perception of a fair application of Regional Plan policies, that every effort be made to ensure consistency in the implementation of Regional Plan policies.

4. That the suggested amendments to the Regional Plan policies pertaining to Rural Estate Residential Developments and contained in Background Paper No. 7 of the Rural Development Policies Review series, be circulated to Area Municipalities and other relevant agencies for comments.

POOR

QUALITY

ORIGINAL